

# Best Of '99: Eminem Says 'My Name Is' Not Slim Shady

While some close to him say rapper is 'great guy,' others say he treads a dangerous line with his lyrics.

By Gil Kaufman

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*[Editor's note: Over the holiday season, SonicNet is looking back at 1999's top stories, chosen by our editors and writers. This story originally ran on Wednesday, March 10.]*

His name is Marshall Mathers. He calls himself Eminem. And he sings through the voice of Slim Shady.

His first single is called "My Name Is," but even he seems to have trouble keeping all his identities straight.

The producer who has shepherded the Detroit rapper's career for the past 10 years paints Eminem as a 24-year-old contradiction.

"The kid is nuts, out of his mind," said Mark Bass, part of the FBT production team that produced Eminem's *The Slim Shady LP*. The often-graphic album, which debuted at #2 on the *Billboard* 200 albums chart last week, was a challenge for Bass, who said he and his brother Jeff worked with Eminem to take the recording right "to the edge before it gets legally weird."

Further blurring the line between the rapper and the persona he chooses to adopt, Bass called Eminem's songs "strictly entertainment," the work of an artist who is both a "loving father and great guy," but who strives to use his lyrics to take people "over the line [with violent content] where [they are] probably afraid to admit to themselves that it's funny."

Eminem, or his title character, makes a lot of bold statements on the *The Slim Shady LP*, his major-label debut.

In addition to the usual gangsta-rap bragging, he also whines in a cartoon-like voice about murdering women, raping underage girls and taking copious amounts of drugs. But Eminem will tell you it's Slim Shady, not he, who has the problems. Rather, Eminem will say, he's just in it for the shock value.

"The world's gonna know when they pop in this *Slim Shady* [album] that something's wrong with this guy," Mathers said prior to the album's release. "It's deeper than me. Oh, I want shock value, I want to shock the world."

Hardly an overnight success, Eminem has spent nearly a decade honing his rhyming skills in Detroit, building a reputation as one of the best freestyle rappers on the Midwestern scene. He released a poorly received debut album, *Infinite*, in 1996, followed by *The Slim Shady EP*, in which the rapper began to perfect his obnoxious, over-the-top style.

After gangsta-rap pioneer Dr. Dre (N.W.A) took the rapper under his wing and signed him to the Aftermath label for the new album, Eminem was set to graduate to the big time.

A playful video for his first single, "My Name Is" ([RealAudio](#)

excerpt), showcases Eminem portraying a number of sitcom-style

characters. Added to surprisingly solid alternative-radio play for the

jokey single, the video has helped the white rapper to quickly establish

a reputation outside the underground hip-hop scene as a slightly risqué,

mischievous MC.

Dre said he found Eminem's tape on the floor of (Interscope Records head) Jimmy Iovine's garage. "[I liked] his voice and what he was talking about," Dre said. "It was just different. There's no doubt people need to hear him."

Some fans of the top-selling rapper said they get the entertainment value of Eminem's darkly sadistic raps, and they can also see the "humor" in his often-misogynist songs. "He has funny songs ... [but the] violence on the album isn't always funny. It depends on the way the lyrics are delivered," wrote 16-year-old David Davies, a U.K.-based webmaster of an unofficial Eminem website.

Davies stated, "Some people might not be able to see the humour in the lyrics, but if they don't like it, they don't have to listen to it."

But even Eminem seems uncertain of the point of his music. One minute,

he claims there is a deeper, political meaning behind his rapping; the

next he dismisses his lyrics as meaningless. "The world is gonna get

offended when they listen to my sh-- and I'm so glad too," Eminem said.

"Because at the end of the day when I come out of the mic booth, I don't

give a sh-- what I just rapped about" ([RealAudio excerpt](#)

of interview).

Attempting to explain himself, Eminem said the Slim Shady "concept" represents two different parts of his personality. "That was the whole intro of the [EP]," Eminem said, "Slim Shady was coming to haunt me ... to haunt Eminem."

At one point, Eminem said Slim Shady had "killed" Eminem, resulting in an album that chronicled "death after death." "Slim Shady is just another part of me," Eminem explained, "the dark, evil, creatively sick part."

But one gangsta-rap veteran said Eminem is treading a treacherous path

with songs such as his twisted morality play "Guilty Conscience"